

PARENTS ARE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S SAFETY.

Your children can be out of your sight but never out of your mind.

You are responsible for them no matter where they are or where you are.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS READY TO BE LEFT ALONE?

Children differ in how fast they grow, mature, develop life skills and sound judgement. One child may be responsible



enough to be left alone, while another child the same age needs supervision. Many school age children are afraid to be left alone, especially after dark.

Before leaving a child alone, families need to consider many important factors. There are steps to take that will help children feel comfortable by themselves. Ask yourself the following questions:

IS MY CHILD EMOTIONALLY READY?

- ☐ Able to be away from you or other adults without feeling lonely or afraid?
- ☐ Handles the unexpected without becoming upset?
- ☐ Willing to follow important rules?
- ☐ Feels comfortable that he or she is ready to stay home alone?



IS MY CHILD MENTALLY READY?

- ☐ Understands and remembers instructions?
- ☐ Able to solve basic problems of being alone?
- ☐ Reads and writes well enough to take telephone messages?
- ☐ Able to find something to do when alone without getting into trouble?



IS MY CHILD SOCIALLY READY?

- ☐ Able to ask for help from friends, neighbors, and police when needed?
- ☐ Understands the role of police, firefighters, and rescue squads?
- ☐ Able to get along with other children and with adults?



IS MY FAMILY READY?

- ☐ Are you able to stay in touch and supervise your child even though you are not at home?
- ☐ Will you, or a friend or relative, be able to help in case of emergencies?
- ☐ Does your family have a regular schedule?



Currently, there are no laws in Virginia that say when or for how long a child can be left alone. However, Alexandria Child Protective Services may be called about a situation involving children of any age being left home alone.

In general, the following guidelines are suggested:

AGE	LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR SELF CARE
Under 16	Should not be left alone overnight.
13-18	May be left alone for more than 3 hours
10-12	Should not be left alone for more than 3 hours
0 – 9	Should always be in the care of a responsible person

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSIBLE SUPERVISION

Children sometimes end up taking care of younger children. It is important that they are capable of caring for them responsibly. Responsible supervision means:

- ☐ knowing what to do in an emergency,
- ☐ having the skills to effectively care for the children in their charge, and
- ☐ being able to keep a child safe.

Caregivers must be mature and ready for responsibility. In general, the following guidelines are suggested:

AGE	LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD CARE
16 – 18	May watch children overnight
13 – 15	May baby sit infants and children but not overnight
10 – 12	May provide care of other children for up to three hours, with the help of an adult

These guidelines were developed by social work professionals, in collaboration with the community. This pamphlet intends to provide guidance only: in certain situations, it may not be safe to leave a child unsupervised, despite the criteria presented here.

If you are considering leaving your child alone on a regular basis, you may want to consider the answers to these questions.

- ☐ Have you done a trial run with your child?
- ☐ Does your child understand telephone safety?
- ☐ What would your child do if he/she were locked out of the house?
- ☐ Does your child know how and when to dial 911?
- ☐ Does your family have a fire safety plan?
- ☐ Has your child been trained in first aid safety?
- ☐ Does your child know how to contact you or another trusted adult?
- ☐ What would your child do in a weather emergency?

RESOURCES

City of Alexandria

Department of Human Services
Office for Early Childhood Development
703-838-0750

Child Protective Services
703-838-0800

Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
703-838-4343

The American Red Cross
703-549-8300
www.alexandriaredcross.org

Stop Child Abuse Now of Northern Virginia (SCAN)
703-820-9001
www.scanva.org

SCAN
STOP CHILD ABUSE NOW
of Northern Virginia



www.OurKids-OurBusiness.org

Department of Human Services
2525 Mt. Vernon Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22301



**Leaving My Child
at Home Alone**
How Old is Old Enough?

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES